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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

war demands

SALVAGE and RE-USE of FRUIT and VEGETABLE CONTAINERS

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Supplies are short

Packaging materials for new containers are scarce. Available materials, formerly used freely by container manufacturers, must now be shared with other essential war industries. Therefore, supplies for fruit and vegetable containers are short, but the demand is high because of the increase in food production.

This situation necessitates the fullest use of our materials—particularly through the salvage and re-use of old containers. The industry must make the most of what is available.

General lumber situation

The users and suppliers of lumber in 1942 were caught in a squeeze. Demand for lumber increased as a result of the larger amounts necessary for military uses and production decreased as a result of labor and equipment shortages. Owing to the increased demand, consumption of lumber in 1942 went up about 11 percent over that of 1941. Also in 1942, production of lumber failed by about 20 percent to equal consumption. The deficit was made up by imports and by withdrawals from inventories. This drain upon supplies has now depleted the stocks of lumber to about 50 percent of normal.

It is estimated that consumption in 1943 can be held, under severest restrictions, to a little more than 31 billion board feet, which is about 25 percent below the consumption of last year. Although consumption for certain uses during 1943 can be reduced below that of last year, increases for other uses will be inevitable. These are chiefly for boxes and crates used as containers for products shipped overseas.

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Fruit and vegetable containers

The minimum essential requirements for containers and shipping material, such as boxes, crating, and dunnage, for 1943 will be about 30 percent more than the consumption in 1942. Most of this increase is for military shipments. Some goods are packed in wooden containers as a result of the scarcity of other packaging materials such as metals. Other types of supplies are being put in wooden packages in order to secure a more substantial container for overseas shipping.

The container picture for fresh fruits and vegetables is somewhat different from that for other commodities. Producers of fruits and vegetables will likely be able to get along with a slightly smaller quantity of wooden containers in 1943 than they did in 1942. The number of board feet of lumber required to package the 1943 crop will be, it is estimated, about 1 percent less than in 1942. This figure will probably be further reduced through the use of containers of substitute materials and limited shipments of products in bulk. These adjustments, however, will not avert a tight package situation. They will not be sufficient to offset possible shortages of container material and increased container demands for military shipments.

Used containers

Careful salvage and re-use of second-hand packages will supplement the supply of fruit and vegetable containers. Every container that is salvaged for re-use aids the general supply situation and the war effort. Such a container may package a product which, in an acute container situation, might not be made

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available to consumers. And the use of the salvaged package will release for other purposes the labor and equipment necessary to make a new box or basket. In addition, such critical materials as wood and metal will be released for use in other war activities.

Because of the many possibilities of salvaging used containers, the amount of critical materials to be saved is considerable. For instance, 1,000 salvaged apple boxes contain enough board feet of wood to crate an average airplane for overseas shipment. Metal in 60 wire-bound citrus boxes can supply the nails and straps for crating a jeep for overseas shipment. One thousand wire-bound citrus boxes have about 500 pounds of metal. Thus, if a quarter of the 18,000,000 new wire-bound citrus boxes used each year were salvaged and re-used, 2,250,000 pounds of metal would be released for shells, tanks, and guns. This saving also would benefit growers, as they are having difficulty in obtaining supplies of wire and nails.

Large markets make showing

Extensive work is already being done in salvaging used containers in some of the large markets. Detailed information is, of course, limited, but a recent survey by the War Production Board indicates that approximately 25 percent of all wooden fruit and vegetable containers which are shipped into New York City are salvaged. The percentage varies greatly among the different types of containers, being very high for such packages as baskets and much lower for nailed boxes.

A group of vegetable growers in the Chicago area recently reported that 65 percent of their used containers were baskets, 24 percent

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were crates, and only 11 percent were boxes. Second-hand containers are more extensively used by growers in the nearby or market-garden areas than in the distant producing districts because of the difficulty and expense of shipping such containers to distant producing centers. Some estimates indicate that as much as 60 percent of the vegetables grown in the Chicago market-garden area are marketed in second-hand containers. The proportion, of course, becomes less as the distance from the city increases, but information recently collected by Cornell University indicates that growers in some of the interior counties of New York State are depending on used containers for as much as 35 percent of their total package requirements.

Collection groups

In the larger cities used containers are collected by a number of agencies. Farmers who live in the nearby districts collect some from the retail stores direct. Many peddlers collect the empty containers from retailers and restaurants. Second-hand dealers or "junkies" arrange with trash collectors to separate containers and scrap pieces from other material. The largest group collecting used containers is chain stores.

Used-package dealers buy containers from "junkies," peddlers, and chain stores and sort them into the various types. These dealers also repair damaged packages and remake others into types more generally in demand. The dealers resell the sorted and repaired packages to farmers in the nearby districts, or to large second-hand wholesalers who may distribute them in the market-garden districts of adjacent cities or to other production centers.

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Remaking and reconditioning

The remaking of other types of containers from such packages as citrus and apple boxes has become an established business in the larger cities. From material in these boxes, crates are made for the packing of cabbage, beans, carrots, onions, and other vegetables.

Reconditioning, as well as remaking, is an important enterprise. Reclaimed pieces of containers, and second-hand nails and wire are used to repair damaged hampers, baskets, or covers. A second-hand wire handle, a bent nail or two with a salvaged slat will often restore a useless damaged container to good condition.

In addition to collecting, remaking, and remodeling, careful handling by dealers all along the line to prevent needless damage is important. Many parts of potentially good containers, which might be used, are thrown on fires in the markets on cold mornings. This is one practice that should be stopped.

Save and serve

Attention to all these factors in regard to used containers will increase the supply of fruit and vegetable packages and release for other vital needs material that otherwise would be required for new containers. Therefore, the program which is operating rather smoothly in the large cities should be expanded and similar programs developed in smaller centers.

What has been said about the need for conserving wooden containers applies with equal force to textile bags and sacks.

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